

## The Aestheticization of Everyday Life

If we examine definitions of postmodernism we find an emphasis upon the effacement of the boundary between art and everyday life, the collapse of the distinction between high art and mass/popular culture, a general stylistic promiscuity and playful mixing of codes. These general features of postmodern theories which stress the equalization and levelling out of symbolic hierarchies, antifoundationalism and a general impulse towards cultural declassification, can also be related to what are held to be the characteristic postmodern experiences. Here one can build upon the use of the term *modernité* by Baudelaire to point to the new experience of modernity, the shocks, jolts, and vivid presentness captured by the break with traditional forms of sociation which the modern cities such as Paris seemed to bring forth from the mid-nineteenth century onwards. In a similar way one might also be able to speak of the experience of *postmodernité* and draw upon perceived shifts in cultural experiences and modes of signification. Here we find an emphasis upon the aestheticization of everyday life and the transformation of reality into images in the work of Baudrillard (1983a). Jameson (1984a) too emphasizes the loss of a sense of history and the fragmentation of time into a series of perpetual presents in which there is the experience of multiphrenic intensities. A similar aestheticization of experience and breaking down of the ordered chain of signifiers can be detected in the writings of their followers where one finds an emphasis upon 'the liquefaction of signs and commodities', 'the effacement of the boundary between the real and the image', 'floating signifiers', 'hyperreality', 'depthless culture', 'bewildering immersion', 'sensory overload' and 'affect-charge intensities' (Kroker and Cook, 1987; Crary, 1984). While many of these examples draw this inspiration from the intensification of image production in the media and consumer culture in general, one also finds it in descriptions of the contemporary city. Here the emphasis is not only on the type of new architecture specifically designated postmodern, but also on the more general eclectic stylistic hotchpotch which one finds in the urban fabric of the built environment. In addition a similar decontextualization of tradition and a raiding of all cultural forms to draw out quotations from the imaginary side of life are found among the young 'de-centred subjects' who enjoy the experimentation and play with fashion and the stylization of life as they stroll through the 'no place' postmodern urban spaces (Chambers, 1987; Calefato, 1988). There are clearly strong linkages and crossovers between the project of the aestheticization and stylization of everyday life on the part of

such groups and the romantic, bohemian art-school tradition which has fed into rock music, particularly since the 1960s, and which has sought in various ways to transgress the boundary between art and everyday life (see Frith and Horne, 1987). This suggests then that the experience of *post-modernité*, in particular the emphasis upon the aestheticization of everyday life and its formulation, articulation and promotion by cultural specialists may have a long history. In short it would be useful to explore the *genealogy* of *postmodernité* and in particular examines the linkages between *modernité* and *postmodernité* which may yet direct us back to still earlier forerunners. This is not to argue that the postmodern does not exist or that it is a misleading concept. Rather it is only by exploring its antecedents and the long-term cultural process in which there may have been earlier similar developments, that we can attempt to understand, and differentiate between, what is specific to the postmodern and what may represent an accumulation and intensification of tendencies long present within the modern, and even pre-modern.

### The aestheticization of everyday life

There are three senses in which we can speak of the aestheticization of everyday life. First we can refer to those artistic subcultures which produced the Dada, historical avant-garde and Surrealist movements in World War I and the 1920s, which sought in their work, writings, and in some cases lives, to efface the boundary between art and everyday life. Postmodern art in the 1960s with its reaction to what was regarded as the institutionalization of modernism in the museum and the academy built on this strategy. It is interesting to note that Marcel Duchamp, who was centrally involved in the earlier Dada movement with his infamous 'readymades', became venerated by the New York postmodern trans-avant-garde artists in the 1960s. Here we detect a double movement. In the first place there is the direct challenge against the work of art, the desire to beauratize art, to dissemble its sacred halo and challenge its respectable location in the museum and the academy. There is also the assumption that art can be anywhere or anything. The detritus of mass culture, the debased consumer commodities, could be art (here one thinks of Warhol and pop art). Art was also to be found in the antiwork: in the 'happening', the transitory 'lost' performance which cannot be museumified, as well as in the body and other sensory objects in the world. It is also worth noting that many of the strategies and artistic techniques of Dada, Surrealism and the avant-garde have been taken up by advertising and the popular media within consumer culture (see Martin, 1981).

Second the aestheticization of everyday life can refer to the project of turning life into a work of art. The fascination of this project on the part of artists and intellectuals and would-be artists and intellectuals has a long history. It can, for example, be found in the Bloomsbury Group around the

turn of the century in which G.E. Moore argued that the greatest goods in life consisted of personal affectations and aesthetic enjoyment. A similar ethic of life as a work of art can be detected in the late-nineteenth-century writing of Pater and Wilde. Wilde's assumption was that the ideal aesthete should 'realize himself in many forms, and by a thousand different ways, and will be curious of new sensations'. It can be argued that postmodernism – especially postmodern theory – has brought aesthetic questions to the fore and there are clear continuities between Wilde, Moore and the Bloomsbury Group, and the writings of Rorty whose criteria for the good life revolve around the desire to enlarge one's self, the quest for new tastes and sensations, to explore more and more possibilities (Shusterman, 1988). We can also detect the centrality of the aesthetic approach to life in the work of Foucault, as Wolin (1986) has argued. Foucault (1986: 41–2) approvingly refers to Baudelaire's conception of modernity in which a central figure is 'the dandy who makes of his body, his behaviour, his feelings and passions, his very existence, a work of art'. In effect the modern man is 'the man who tries to invert himself'. Dandyism, which first developed with Beau Brummel in England in the early nineteenth century, stressed the quest for special superiority through the construction of an uncompromising exemplary lifestyle in which an aristocracy of spirit manifested itself in a contempt for the masses and the heroic concern with the achievement of originality and superiority in dress, demeanour, personal habits and even furnishings – what we now call lifestyle (see R.H. Williams, 1982: 107 ff.). It became an important theme in the development of artistic countercultures, the bohème and avant-gardes in mid- to late-nineteenth-century Paris, and one finds a fascination with it in the writings and lives of Balzac, Baudelaire, Comte d'Orsay down to Edmond de Goncourt, de Montesquieu and Huysmans' *Des Esseintes*. This dual focus on a life of aesthetic consumption and the need to form life into an aesthetically pleasing whole on the part of artistic and intellectual countercultures should be related to the development of mass consumption in general and the pursuit of new tastes and sensations and the construction of distinctive lifestyles which has become central to consumer culture (Featherstone, 1987a).

The third sense of the aestheticization of everyday life refers to the rapid flow of signs and images which saturate the fabric of everyday life in contemporary society. The theorization of this process has drawn much from Marx's theory of the fetishism of commodities which has been developed in various ways by Lukács, the Frankfurt School, Benjamin, Haug, Lefebvre, Baudrillard and Jameson. For Adorno the increasing dominance of exchange value not only obliterated the original use-value of things and replaced it by abstract exchange value, but it left the commodity free to take on an ersatz or secondary use-value, what Baudrillard was later to refer to as 'sign-value'. The centrality of the commercial manipulation of images through advertising the media and the displays, performances and spectacles of the urbanized fabric of daily life therefore entails a constant reworking of desires through images. Hence the consumer society must not be

regarded as only releasing a dominant materialism for it also confronts people with dream-images which speak to desires, and aestheticize and de-realize reality (Haug, 1987: 123). It is this aspect which has been taken up by Baudrillard and Jameson who emphasize the new and central role which images play in the consumer society which gives culture an unprecedented importance. For Baudrillard it is the build-up, density and seamless, all-encompassing extent of the production of images in contemporary society which has pushed us towards a qualitatively new society in which the distinction between reality and image become effaced and everyday life becomes aestheticized: the simulational world or postmodern culture. It is worth adding that this process has generally been evaluated negatively by the above writers who stress the manipulative aspects (Benjamin to some extent and Baudrillard in his later writings being exceptions). This has prompted some to argue for a more progressive integration of art and everyday life – as, for example we find in Marcuse's (1969) *Essay on Liberation*. We also find this in the notions of cultural revolution developed in various ways by Henry Lefebvre (1971), with his plea to 'let everyday life become a work of art', and the International Situationists (see Poster, 1975).

This third aspect of the aestheticization of everyday life is of course central to the development of consumer culture and we need to be aware of its interplay with the second strand we have identified: in effect we need to examine the long-term process of their relational development which has entailed the development of mass consumer culture dream-worlds and a separate (counter)cultural sphere in which artists and intellectuals have adopted various strategies of distanciation, as well as attempting to thematize and comprehend this process. First we will examine in more detail the writings of Baudrillard to gain a stronger sense of the meaning of the aestheticization of everyday life in relation to postmodernism.

In his earlier writings on the consumer society Baudrillard developed a theory of the commodity-sign, in which he pointed to the way in which the commodity has become a sign in the Saussurean sense with its meaning arbitrarily determined by its position in a self-referential set of signifiers. In his more recent writings Baudrillard (1983a, 1983b) has pushed this logic even further to draw attention to the overload of information provided by the media which now confront us with an endless flow of fascinating images and simulations. so that 'TV is the world'. In *Simulations* Baudrillard (1983a: 148) states that in this hyperreality the real and the imaginary are confused and aesthetic fascination is everywhere so that 'a kind of non-intentional parody hovers over everything, of technical simulating, of indefinable fame to which is attached an aesthetic pleasure'. For Baudrillard (1983a: 151) art ceases to be a separate enclaved reality; it enters into production and reproduction so that everything 'even if it be the everyday and banal reality, falls by this token under the sign of art, and becomes aesthetic'. The end of the real and the end of art moves us into a hyperreality in which the secret discovered by Surrealism becomes more widespread and generalized. As Baudrillard (1983a: 148) remarks:

It is reality itself today that is hyperrealist. Surrealism's secret already was that the most banal reality could become surreal, but only in certain privileged moments that are still nevertheless connected with art and the imaginary. Today it is quotidian reality in its entirety – political, social, historical and economic – that from now on incorporates the simulating dimension of hyper-realism. We live everywhere already in an 'aesthetic' hallucination of reality.

The contemporary simulational world has seen the end of the illusion of relief, perspective and depth as the real is emptied out and the contradiction between the real and the imaginary is effaced. Baudrillard (1983a: 151) adds

And so art is everywhere, since artifice is at the very heart of reality. And so art is dead, not only because its critical transcendence is gone, but because reality itself, entirely impregnated by an aesthetic which is inseparably from its own structure, has been confused with its own image.

In this third stage of simulational culture, which Baudrillard now calls postmodern (Kellner, 1987), one of the forms often used as an illustration is MTV (see Chen, 1987; Kaplan, 1986, 1987). According to Kaplan (1986) MTV seems to exist in a timeless present with video artists ransacking film genres and art movements from different historical periods to blur boundaries and the sense of history. History becomes specialized out, aesthetic hierarchies and developments are collapsed with the mixing of genres and high art, popular and commercial forms. It is argued that the continuous flow of diverse images makes it difficult to chain them together into a meaningful message; the intensity and degree of saturation of signifiers defy systematization and narrativity. Yet we should raise the question of how those images work: has MTV moved beyond a sign system which forms a structured language in the Saussurean sense?

The distinction between *discourse* and *figure* which Scott Lash (1988) takes from the work of Lyotard (1971) may go some way toward helping to answer this question. Lash points to a number of features which make postmodern culture figural: its emphasis upon primary processes (desire) rather than secondary (the ego); upon images rather than words; upon the immersion of the spectator and investment of desire in the object as opposed to the maintenance of distance. Lash also associates these qualities with the process of de-differentiation. This notion is based on a reversal of the process of cultural *differentiation* Weber and Habermas refer to (which entails the differentiation of aesthetic forms from the real world) to *de-differentiation*, which implies a reversal to favour the de-auraticization of art, and an aesthetics of desire, sensation and immediacy. For Lash, then, de-differentiation and figural regimes of signification point to the way in which images unlike language are based upon perceptual memories which draw on the unconscious, which is not structured like language with systematic rules. Images signify iconically, that is through resemblances. While the figural is found in visual regimes of signification such as the cinema, television and advertisements, it can also be said to be a general feature of consumer culture. Here we can refer to Benjamin's (1982b) emphasis upon the sense of intoxication and the poetization of the

banal in the dream-worlds of mass consumption, which is central to his discussion of the mid-nineteenth-century Paris arcades in his *Passagen-Werk*. A study which, with its focus on nineteenth-century Paris, brings together in time and space the origins of the second and third sense of the aestheticization of everyday life we have discussed.

The aestheticization of everyday life through the figural regimes of signification, which Lash (1988) holds as central to postmodernism, then, may have its origins in the growth of consumer culture in the big cities of nineteenth-century capitalist societies, which became the sites for the intoxicating dream-worlds, the constantly changing flow of commodities, images and bodies (the *flâneur*). In addition those big cities were the sites of the artistic and intellectual countercultures, the bohémias and artistic avant-gardes, members of whom became fascinated by and sought to capture in various media the range of new sensations, and who also acted as intermediaries in stimulating, formulating and disseminating these sensibilities to wider audiences and publics (see Seigel 1986). While the literature on modernity pays attention to the centrality of this experience of *modernité*, the shocks, jolts, and phantasmagoria of the new urban centres captured in Baudelaire's discussion of the *flâneur* and Benjamin's discussion of the arcades, we need to consider how relevant it is to understanding the experience of 'postmodernité'.

Hence we need to investigate the continuities and discontinuities with late-twentieth-century practices and sites. This would point us towards a consideration of urban renewal through the process of postmodernization (Cooke, 1988; Zukin, 1988a) with the gentrification of inner city areas and the emergence of simulational environments which use spectacular imagery in malls, shopping centres, theme parks and hotels. In addition, it has been argued that significant changes are taking place in institutions (which were formerly) designated as restricted spaces for the educated connoisseur and serious viewer: museums. Today museums seek to cater for larger audiences and discard their exclusively high-culture label to become sites for spectacles, sensation, illusion and montage; places where one has an experience, rather than where knowledge of the canon and established symbolic hierarchies are inculcated (Roberts, 1988). We also need to inquire into the process of the articulation, transmission and dissemination of the experience of these new spaces by intellectuals and cultural intermediaries to various audiences and publics and examine the way in which pedagogies of these 'new' sensibilities are incorporated into everyday practices.

This points to the need to investigate the aestheticization of everyday life in specific locations in time and space. While the total aestheticization of everyday life would entail the breaking down of the barriers between art, the aesthetic sensibility and everyday life so that artifice becomes the only reality available, we should not assume this is a given, or something in the nature of human perception which once discovered can be read back into all previous human existence. Rather we should investigate the process of its formation. It is therefore necessary to raise the stark sociological questions of the specific locations and degree of generality. Here we investigate the



sociogenetic historical origins of particular cognitive styles and modes of perception which arise in the changing interdependencies and struggles between figurations of people. To take two brief examples: as Robbins (1987) has shown in his study of nineteenth-century British mountaineers the process whereby mountains, long regarded with indifference by travellers and locals alike, became objects of beauty which would yield up aesthetic pleasures was a definite social process involving the development, education and institutionalization of new tastes in the middle classes; likewise in the early eighteenth century the emergence of the Grand Tour began to attract nobles and upper-class people who desire to experience the ruins and art treasures of Europe, whereas previously the general attitude had been a reluctance to leave one's own locality which was usually conceived of as providing all the sensations and pleasures that one could possibly ever need (Hazard, 1964: 23).

It is clear that we need to work towards a more precise sense of what is meant by the aestheticization of everyday life. More generally aesthetics has sought to investigate the nature of art, beauty, aesthetic experience and the criteria for aesthetic judgement (Wolff, 1983: 13, 68 ff.). Since the development of modern aesthetics in the eighteenth century one influential tradition has developed from Kant's *Critique of Aesthetic Judgement*, in which the distinguishing characteristic of aesthetic judgement of taste is disinterestedness and from this perspective anything can be looked at in the aesthetic attitude, including the full gamut of objects in everyday life. Hence Simmel shows the influence of this tradition when he refers to the pleasures involved in looking at objects from a detached, contemplative point of view, without direct immersion (Frisby, 1981: 151). This distanced, voyeuristic attitude is to be found in the stroller in the large cities whose senses are overstimulated by the flood of new perspectives, impressions and sensations that flow past him. Yet we also face the question of the necessity of distantiation and whether the reversal of it in the figural can also be described as entailing an aesthetic orientation. In the same way that Lash (1988) speaks about de-differentiation, it may also be useful to refer to de-distantiation or instantiation – that is, the pleasure from immersion into the objects of contemplation. (Here we are using distantiation in a different way from that used by Mannheim (1956) in his discussion of the democratization of culture.) De-distantiation has the benefit of capturing the capacity to view objects and experiences usually placed outside the range of institutionally designated aesthetic objects in the way it points to the immediacy of the object, the immersion into the experience through the investment of desire. Effectively it involves the capacity to develop a de-control of the emotions, to open oneself up to the full range of sensations available which the object can summon up. A further question which needs to be considered is to what extent can the figural and de-differentiation discussed by Lash as well as the above use of de-distantiation, be used to suggest further related categories, pre-differentiation and pre-distantiation, which point to a similar immersion and abandonment of coded controls and enframing of experiences which occurs prior to differentiation and

distantiation processes, or can be said to emerge and be cultivated along them in circumscribed liminal moments. On a theoretical level it may be useful to approach this at a later point in terms of the changing balances that occur between involvement and detachment. Elias (1987c) points to the way in which the artist swings between extreme emotional involvement and detachment. Indeed it is a central capacity generated within artistic subcultures to cultivate and manage the capacity to shift between the full exploration and control of the emotions both in the process of producing the work of art and in developing an associated style of life. (This will be discussed in more detail below.) Finally it should be added that if aesthetics is held to revolve around questions of taste, Bourdieu (1984) has developed an opposition between the high Kantian aesthetics involving cognitive appreciation, distantiation, and the controlled cultivation of pure taste and what it denies, the enjoyment of the immediate, sensory, 'grotesque' bodily pleasures of the popular classes. In terms of the aestheticization of everyday life we have to ask how far the direct impressions, sensations and images of the consumer culture 'dream-worlds' in the big cities, which find resonances in postmodernism's figural regimes of signification, have a much longer history within the process of development of the popular classes and their culture. But first we must turn to a brief consideration of the experience of modernity in the large cities of mid- and late-nineteenth-century Europe as discussed by Baudelaire, Benjamin and Simmel.

### *Modernité*

Baudelaire, Benjamin and Simmel all sought to account for the new experiences of *modernité* in the big cities of the mid- to late-nineteenth century. Baudelaire focused on the Paris of the 1840s and 1850s, which was subsequently to fascinate Benjamin. Baudelaire's world with its growth of mass culture became the subject of Benjamin's (1982b) unfinished *Passagen-Werk*. Simmel's *Philosophy of Money*, written in the 1890s and published in 1900, also focuses on the experience of strollers and consumers in the new crowded urban spaces of Berlin. Simmel's Berlin was also the subject for Benjamin's reflections on his childhood: *Berliner Kindheit um 1900*, and 'Berlin Chronicle' (Benjamin, 1979).

Baudelaire was fascinated by the fleeting transitory beauty and ugliness of life in mid-nineteenth-century Paris: the changing pageants of fashionable life, the *flâneurs* strolling through the fleeting impressions of the crowds, the dandies, the heroes of modern life – referred to by Lefebvre (1978) as 'spontaneous (as opposed to professional) artists' – who sought to turn their lives into works of art (quoted in Frisby, 1985b: 19). For Baudelaire art should endeavour to capture these modern scenarios. He despised contemporary artists who painted pictures with the costumes and furnishings of ancient Rome, Greece, the Middle Ages or the Orient. Rather the artist should be aware that 'every age has its own gait, glance and



gesture ... not only in manners and gestures, but even in the form of the face' (Baudelaire, 1964: 12). Likewise every trade or profession stamps its marks in terms of beauty or ugliness on the face and body. Hence the painter of modern life, such as Constantine Guys, whom Baudelaire admired, should endeavour to seek out the transitory, fleeting beauty which is being ever more rapidly reconstituted.

Baudelaire was fascinated by the crowd. Benjamin (1973: 169) contrasts the distaste Engels felt for the crowd and Poe's depiction of the fear and menace of the crowd with Baudelaire's *flâneur* who inhabited a different crowd in the arcades where he had elbow-room to stroll in comfort and leisure (Benjamin, 1973: 194). The new Parisian arcades were the subject of Benjamin's (1982b) *Passagen-Werk*. Literally they are passages, worlds without windows which are 'soul spaces of the psyche' (van Reijen, 1988). These consumer culture 'dream-worlds', the arcades and department stores, were for Benjamin materializations of the phantasmagoria which Marx talked about in his section on 'the fetishism of commodities' in volume 1 of *Capital*. The new department stores and arcades were temples in which goods were worshipped as fetishes. Benjamin sought to give expression to the 'sex appeal of the anorganic in the fetish character of commodities' (van Reijen, 1988). (For a discussion of the department store and arcades see R.H. Williams, 1982; Geist, 1983.)

Within the age of industrialism art's power as illusion, its authority as an original work, the source of its 'aura', became shifted over into industry with painting moving into advertising, architecture into technical engineering, handicrafts and sculpture into the industrial arts, to produce a mass culture. Paris exemplified this new urban panorama of visual representations. As Buck-Morss (1983: 213) remarks:

One could say that the dynamics of capitalist industrialism had caused a curious reversal in which 'reality' and 'art' switch places. Reality becomes artificial, a phantasmagoria of commodities and architectural construction made possible by the new industrial processes. The modern city was nothing but the proliferation of such objects, the density of which created an artificial landscape of buildings and consumer items as totally encompassing as the earlier, natural one. In fact for children (like Benjamin) born into an urban environment, they appeared to be nature itself. Benjamin's understanding of commodities was not merely critical. He affirmed them as utopian with images which 'liberated creativity from art, just as in the XVIth century the sciences freed themselves from philosophy' [*Passagen-Werk*: 1236, 1249]. This phantasmagoria of industrially-produced material objects, buildings, boulevards, all sorts of commodities from tour-books to toilet articles – for Benjamin *was* mass culture, and it is the central concern of the *Passagen-Werk*.

The mass media of the twentieth century, with Hollywood films, the growing advertising industry and television could replicate this commodity world endlessly, although Benjamin still held that the mass media, especially film, could be used in a more critical way not to duplicate the illusions, but to demonstrate that reality was illusion.

The constant recycling of artistic and historical themes in the aestheticized commodity world meant that the city landscape conferred on childhood

memories the quality of alluring half-forgotten dreams. In the mythical and magical world of the modern city the child discovered the new anew, and the adult rediscovers the old in the new (Buck-Morss, 1983: 219). The capacity of the ever-changing urban landscape to summon up associations, resemblances and memories feeds the curiosity of the stroller in the crowds. To the idler who strolls the streets, objects appear divorced from their context and subject to mysterious connections in which meanings are read on the surface of things (Buck-Morss, 1986: 106). Baudelaire (1964: 4) sought to capture this in his use of the metaphor of the post-illness ability to see everything anew in its immediacy. Convalescence, he tells us, is like a return to childhood: the 'convalescent, like the child is possessed in the highest degree of the faculty of keenly interesting himself in things, be they apparently of the most trivial ... The child sees everything in a state of newness, he is always *drunk*' (quoted in Frisby, 1985b: 17). This passage is interesting because it resembles one in which Fredric Jameson (1984b: 118) talks about 'intensities' as in schizophrenia being one of the key features of postmodern culture and refers to vivid powerful experiences charged with affect. This leads to a breakdown of the relationship between signifiers and the fragmentation of time into a series of perpetual presents which is found in schizophrenia or post-illness perceptions. This, then, would seem to be a good example of the figural aesthetic.

In his discussion of Georg Simmel as the first sociologist of modernity, David Frisby (1985a) points to the way in which the themes of neurasthenia, the big-city dweller and the customer which Benjamin (1973: 106) detected in Baudelaire's work are also paramount in Simmel's discussion of modernity. Simmel develops interesting insights into the aesthetic dimensions of the architecture of world exhibitions whose transitory and illusory nature echoes the aesthetic dimension of commodities we have already spoken of. A similar process of the introduction of aesthetics into non-aesthetic areas can also be found in fashion. The intensified pace of fashion increases our time-consciousness, and our simultaneous pleasure in newness and oldness gives us a strong sense of presentness. Changing fashions and world exhibitions point to the bewildering plurality of styles in modern life. For the middle classes the retreat to the interior of the household offered little refuge from style, for at the turn of the century when Simmel was writing, the contemporary *Jugendstil* movement (in Britain there was the parallel movement known as Aestheticism) sought to stylize 'every pot and pan'. The stylization of the interior was a paradoxical attempt to provide a toning down and relatively stable background to the subjectivism of modern life (Frisby, 1985a: 65).

For Frisby (1985a: 52) Simmel's theory of cultural modernity is preferable to that of Habermas. Although Habermas (1981a) discusses the aesthetics of modernity in terms of Baudelaire his definition of cultural modernity draws on Max Weber's theory of modernity involving the differentiation of the spheres of life (Habermas, 1984). For Frisby Simmel's position is preferable, as it attempts to ground the aesthetic sphere in the modern life world rather than see it as separate from the other spheres of life.

We can use these contrasting positions to make a number of points with which to conclude the section. First it may not be a question of Habermas or Simmel, but rather that both are looking at different aspects of the same process. Habermas's position builds on Weber's discussion of the emergence of separate artistic countercultures such as the bohémias of the mid-nineteenth century. While the term 'cultural sphere', which includes science, law, religion as well as art, may direct us away from the interdependencies it has with the rest of society, it has the merit of focusing attention on the *carriers* – to the growth in numbers and power-potential of specialists in symbolic production, and in particular for our purposes, artists and intellectuals. The artistic countercultures were also spatially located in the big cities of the nineteenth century, and in particular in Paris (Seigel, 1986), which Benjamin called 'the capital of the nineteenth century'. We therefore have to consider the position of the artist and intellectual as stroller, moving through the new urban spaces and taking in the shocks, jolts, flows of the crowd and dream-worlds we have talked about.

What is important about this group, whose members are by trade predisposed to observe and record experiences, is that the experiences they captured while floating through the urban spaces were taken to be *the* definitive experiences of these places. In Baudelaire, Simmel and Benjamin we have numerous references to the observer's sense of detachment, then swings of immersion (involvement), but they all presume the city crowd to be a mass of anonymous individuals which they can slip into and which carries them along. Baudelaire (1964: 9) for example talks of the pleasure of seeing 'the world, to be at the centre of the world, and yet to remain hidden from the world'. Yet the spectator is not invisible, and we could follow Bourdieu (1984) and cite good reason why the *petit bourgeois* intellectual or artist may seek such invisibility and feel he is floating in the social space. He is, however, not a perfect recorder, or camera taking snapshots, he (and we need to use the term advisedly, as Janet Wolff (1985) points out in her essay 'The Invisible *Flâneuse*') is an embodied human being whose appearance and demeanour give off readable impressions and signs to those around him. These signs are to be found not only inscribed in the professions and the prostitute, but in the artist and intellectual too. Although the crowd, with its rapid flow of bodies, may be a place of unspoken encounters, the process of decoding and delight in reading other people's appearances goes on apace as Baudelaire points out. Baudelaire was not only aware of the ways in which intellectual and artistic activities, including his own work, had become commodified, he disdained the attempts of the ethereal, spiritually minded artist to escape the process of appropriation in public life. Hence in his prose piece 'Loss of a Halo' he mocks the poet who thinks he can float invisibly through the crowds and shows that his art is profane and his persona socially recognizable (see Spencer, 1985: 71; Berman, 1982: 155).

Once we move from this liminal sphere into direct social encounters in shops, offices, institutions, the flow is slowed down and the reading process goes on more precisely as participants are able to detect, monitor and react

to the symbolic power manifest in the unconscious bodily signs and gestures: the dress, style, tone of voice, facial expression, demeanour, stance, gait; and incorporated in body volume, height, weight etc., which betray the social origins of the bearer. In effect, the artist and intellectual must be understood in terms of their lifestyle, which is socially recognizable and locatable in the social space. They also have a social interest in (1) the wider acceptance of their perceptions on life, namely, the value of the aesthetic gaze even while challenging and negating it: the value of cultural and intellectual goods in general and the need for instruction into how to use and experience them; and (2) the proclamation of the superiority of their lifestyle manifest in their subcultures so that others will adopt the 'off-duty' fashions, styles and perceptions they embody – if not those of the very moment, put forth by the avant-garde, then those of yesterday which would maintain the useful distance between the cognoscenti and their eager, but lagging behind, audiences and followers.

While we can use Weber and Habermas to direct us towards the artists' and intellectuals' tastes and lifestyles, and their interest in the generalization of aesthetic perceptions and sensibilities, Simmel and Benjamin can be used to direct us towards the way in which the urban landscape has become aestheticized and enchanted through the architecture, billboards, shop displays, advertisements, packages, street signs etc., and through the embodied persons who move through these spaces: the individuals who wear, to varying degrees, fashionable clothing, hair-styles, make-up, or who move, or hold their bodies, in particular stylized ways. The aestheticization of everyday life in this second sense points to the expansion and extension of commodity production in the big cities which has thrown up new buildings, department stores, arcades, malls and so on, and which has produced an endless array of goods to fill the shops and clothe and cater for those who pass through them. It is this double capacity of the commodity to be exchange value and ersatz use-value, to be the same and different, which allows it to take up an aestheticized image, whatever may be the one currently dreamt up. Sennett (1976), for example, tells of how in the first Parisian department store, Bon Marché, shortly after it was opened in the 1850s one of the first window displays featured pots and pans. The pots and pans were stylistically arranged into a South Sea Island display with shells, coral beads, palms and the like to produce an aesthetic effect. We have also to ask the question 'Who arranged the display?' The answer would be window dressers, but we can also point to other related workers in fields such as advertising, marketing, design, fashion, commercial art, architecture and journalism who help to design and create the dream-worlds. In many ways their tastes, dispositions and classificatory schemes are similar to those of the artists and intellectuals, and they usually keep in touch with the latest developments in this sphere. Hence in many overt and subtle ways they also transmit aesthetic dispositions and sensibilities, and the notions of 'the artist as hero' and the importance of the 'stylization life' to wider publics (see Allen, 1983; Frith and Horne, 1987; Zukin, 1988b). In effect, as

cultural intermediaries they have an important role in educating the public into new styles and tastes.

The second point we can note is that many of the features associated with the postmodern aestheticization of everyday life have a basis in modernity. The predominance of images, liminality, the vivid intensities characteristic of the perceptions of children, those recovering from illness, schizophrenics and others, and figural regimes of signification can all be said to have parallels in the experiences of *modernité* as described by Baudelaire, Benjamin and Simmel. In this sense we can point to the links between modernism and post-modernism as Lyotard (1984: 72) does when he says that postmodernism 'is not modernism at its end but in the nascent state, and that state is constant'. While Lyotard is referring to artistic modernism and takes a Kantian perspective on postmodernity as the avant-gardist attempt to constantly express the inexpressible and represent the unrepresentable, we can also extend this to late-twentieth-century spectacles and simulated environments in malls, shopping centres, department stores, theme parks, 'Disneyworlds' etc. (see Urry, 1988), which have many features in common with the department stores, arcades, world fairs etc. described by Benjamin and Simmel and others. To mention a brief example: the Paris Exposition of 1900 involved a number of simulations including an exotic Indian landscape with stuffed animals, treasures and merchandise; an exhibit representing Andalucian Spain at the times of the Moors with simulated interiors and courtyards; a Trans-Siberian panorama which placed spectators in a real railway car which moved along a track, while a canvas was unrolled outside the window to give an impression of Siberia. There was also a demonstration of a multi-projector spectacle, an early forerunner of Cinerama (see R.H. Williams, 1982).

Third the figural emphasis upon primary processes, the flows of images, dreamlike quality of modernity with its vivid intensities and sense of wonder at the commodity aesthetics on display may itself be traceable back further than modernity. We will shortly look at the forerunners in carnivals, fairs, theatres and other public spaces. Such locations offered excitement, a new range of sensations and the general de-control of the emotions, a contrast and temporary relief from the general control of affects which results from civilizing processes.

Fourth we will have little to say about the progressive or retrogressive aspects of this process, save to note that a good deal has been made of the antinomial, transgressive qualities of the artistic and intellectual subcultures of modernism, and their invasion of everyday life through the development of consumer culture. In effect for Bell (1976) art has undermined morality, and the puritan work ethic gives way to the hedonistic search for new sensations and gratifications on the part of the untrammelled self'. It is possible that Bell has overemphasized the social threat and demoralizing effect on society through an overemphasis on the transgressive socially destabilizing qualities of art and an overestimation of the role of beliefs as opposed to practices in producing a viable social order. In addition despite many attempts by artists to outbid each other in their quest to scandalize the

petite bourgeoisie, it can be argued that rather than being a naïve uncontrolled emotional regression many of the practices and lifestyles of artists necessarily involve 'a controlled de-control of the emotions', which may entail, and indeed require, the mutual respect and self-restraint of the participants as opposed to a narcissistic regression which threatens to destroy the social bond (see Wouters, 1986).

### **The middle classes and the control of the carnivalesque**

For Daniel Bell (1976) modernism with its antinomical and transgressive qualities has dominated in the arts since the mid-nineteenth century. Certainly since the mid-nineteenth century, especially in Paris after the 1848 revolution, we see the emergence of bohémias which adopt the strategies of transgression in their art and lifestyle (Seigel, 1986). The representatives of the bohème existed outside the limits of bourgeois society and were identified with the proletariat and the Left. Hauser (1982) refers to the bohémians as the first true artistic proletariat consisting of people whose existence was completely insecure. Indeed they lived cheek by jowl with the lower orders in the low-rent areas of the large cities. They cultivated similar manners, valuing spontaneity, an antisystematic work ethos, and a lack of attention to the sense of ordered living space and controls and conventions of the respectable middle class. Yet while the symbols and lifestyle may have seemed to be new within the middle classes, there is a long history of the transgressive strategies they adopted. Within the middle classes there are attempts to use transgressive symbols to shock which runs parallel to civilizing processes which sought to bring about the control of emotions through manners. It is therefore possible, following Stallybrass and White (1986) to see bohémias as producing 'liminoid symbolic repertoires' similar to those afforded by earlier carnival forms. Middle-class bohémias, especially surrealism and expressionism, took over in a displaced form much of the symbolic inversion and transgressions which were found in the carnival. It may be possible therefore to trace back to the carnival of the Middle Ages many of the figural aspects, the disconnected succession of fleeting images, sensations, de-control of the emotions and de-differentiation which have become associated with postmodernism and the aestheticization of everyday life.

In their *Politics and Poetics of Transgression* (1986) Stallybrass and White discuss the relational nature of carnivals, festivals and fairs which are seen as symbolic inversions and transgressions in which the distinction between high/low, official/popular, grotesque/classical are mutually constructed and deformed. They draw on Bakhtin's (1968) work to point to the ways in which the carnival involves the celebration of the grotesque body – fattening food, intoxicating drink, sexual promiscuity – in a world in which official culture is turned upside down. The grotesque body of the carnival is the lower body of impurity, disproportion, immediacy, orifices – the material body, which is the opposite of the classical body, which is beautiful, symmetrical, elevated,



perceived from a distance and which is the ideal body. The grotesque body and the carnival represent the otherness which is excluded from the process of formation of middle-class identity and culture. With the extension of the civilizing process into the middle classes the need for greater controls over the emotions and bodily functions produced changes in manners and conduct which heightened the sense of disgust at direct emotional and bodily expressivity (Elias, 1978b, 1982). In effect the other which is excluded as part of the identity formation process becomes the object of desire.

Stallybrass and White provide an interesting discussion of the dual role of fairs as, first, the open space of the marketplace in which commercial exchanges take place in a local market which is connected to, and displays wares from other national and international markets. Second, fairs are sites of pleasure: they are local, festive and communal and unconnected to the real world. Fairs were therefore not just guardians of local traditions, they were sites of transformation of popular tradition through the intersection of different cultures; they were sites of what Bakhtin refers to as *hybridization*, which brought together the exotic and familiar, the village and townsmen, the professional performer and bourgeois observer. As agents of cultural pluralism they were not, then, just 'otherness' to official discourse, but involved the disruption of provincial habits and local traditions via the introduction of different, more cosmopolitan people and cultural objects. They displayed the exotic and strange commodities from different parts of the world and along with a flood of strange signs, bizarre juxtapositions, people with different dress, demeanour and languages, freaks, spectacles and performances stimulated desire and excitement. They were in effect outdoor forerunners of the department stores and world exhibitions of the late nineteenth century, and we can surmise produced some of the same effects in a less tamed and controlled manner. Aspects of the untamed emotions, inversions and transgressions which still produced a kind of 'social vertigo' and festive disorder survived in the music halls (see Bailey, 1986a, 1986b; Clark, 1985). The excitement and fears the fair can arouse is still captured today in films which highlight the way in which these liminal spaces are sites in which excitement, danger, and the shock of the grotesque merge with dreams and fantasies which threaten to overwhelm and engulf the spectators. Today funfairs and theme parks such as Disneyland still retain this aspect, albeit in a more controlled safer way, to provide enclaved environments for the controlled de-control of the emotions, where adults are given permission to behave like children again.

Elements of the carnivalesque were displaced from the fair into literature. Writing about the fair could be an act bent on producing carnivalesque outrage or dissociation from these lower pleasures. In the seventeenth century we also find attempts by Dryden and others to transform theatre audiences from the inattentive, noisy, carnivalesque rabble into the disciplined, controlled, polite and appreciative bourgeois theatre public. These contrary pulls towards popular culture and a more genteel educative culture in the middle classes opened up spaces for cultural entrepreneurs. Sir Robert

Southwell in 1685 wrote to advise his son that he should consider Bartholemew Fair as a suitable subject for a profitable book. To write the book his son would have to learn the rules of resemblances and differentiation of the fair by watching it from some high window to survey the crowd. He was also advised to read Ben Jonson's play on the fair (Stallybrass and White, 1986: 118–19). Here we have an early example of the education project of the middle class in developing structured accounts and pedagogies for new publics about how to read popular cultural experiences in an aestheticized way. Southwell is clear about the dangers of the enterprise, that his son will be lost in endless distinctions which end in 'blank confusion'. This is the threat of disorder which demands elevation and not immersion in order to produce the detached aesthetic appreciation.

We find a similar example in Wordsworth's account of Bartholemew Fair in *The Prelude* (1805). While the fair is 'monstrous' he revels in the 'colour, motion, shape, sight and sounds' of the wonders from all parts of the world which are jumbled up together to produce a transgression and confusion of boundaries in which animals become human, humans become animals etc. (Stallybrass and White, 1986: 120). For Wordsworth the proliferation of difference and the erosion of boundaries in the fair and the city threaten to 'cast loose the chain of signifiers' and dissolve his identity into 'blank confusion' (Stallybrass and White, 1986: 123). The fear of total immersion, the loss of boundaries and the loss of self is resolved by Wordsworth by invoking the classical 'Muse'. In effect the symbolic hierarchies of a classical aesthetic are invoked to retain some neoclassical notion of an education project in which the lower orders and forms will be raised up and ennobled by the poet. For the varieties of modernism that developed in the late nineteenth century and postmodernism in the late twentieth century the neoclassical option was ruled out and the figural disorders explored and cultivated. This is not to imply that the educative mission was abandoned; far from it. Rather the educative project becomes one in which the techniques necessary for a controlled de-control of the emotions are developed. Techniques of the self which will permit the development of sensibilities which can allow us to enjoy the swing between the extremes of aesthetic involvement and detachment so that the pleasures of immersion and detached distanciation can both be enjoyed.

The civilizing process therefore involved an increasing control of the emotions, sense of disgust at bodily betrayal, the smells, sweating and noises of the lower body, and sensitivity to one's own bodily space. It involved the middle class in a process of complex distancing from the popular, the grotesque other. Yet Stallybrass and White (1986: 191) argue that this rise in the threshold of the disgust function which Elias (1978b) talks about also bears the offprint of desire for the expelled other which became the source of fascination, longing and nostalgia. Hence we have the attractions of the forest, fair, theatre, circus, slum, savage, seaside resort for the bourgeois. If the experience of these sites were not acknowledged, if the structures of the civilizing process were too strong, then there was the

possibility that this danger zone *outside* of consciousness would become one *inside*, in the subconscious fed by the struggle to exclude it. Hysteria in late-nineteenth-century middle-class women is an example of the price of excluding the lower body and associated symbolic disorders. We should also add that rather than see a strong polarization derived from the 'binaryism of symbolic functioning' which is held by Stallybrass and White (1986: 189) to be at the centre of cultural production, it is also possible to detect shifts in the balances between civilizing and informalizing (emotional decontrolling) processes which themselves represent a higher level of control of the emotions and not a regression: that is, a 'controlled de-control of the emotions' (Wouters, 1987). In this sense, as I have argued elsewhere (chapter 3), postmodernism has drawn much from the social and cultural wave of informalization in the 1960s. The elements of the carnivalesque which became displaced into art, and retained in consumer cultural sites and spectacles, and in the media of film and television, now have larger middle-class audiences who have moved away from the more rigid personality structure associated with the puritan ethic which Bell (1976) speaks of, and are better able to cope with threatening emotions. In effect fractions of the new middle class have become more educated into a controlled de-control of the emotions and the sensibilities and tastes that support a greater appreciation of the aestheticization of everyday life.

### Concluding remarks

In this chapter I have attempted to sketch out some of the features of the aestheticization of everyday life and have argued that it is not unique to postmodernism but that it can be traced back to the experience of the big cities of the mid-nineteenth century as described by Baudelaire, Benjamin and Simmel. We have also argued that similar aesthetic experiences seem also to have been generated in the carnival and fairs in which the emergent middle classes struggled to grapple with the symbolic inversions and the grotesque body of the lower orders which remained an ever-present otherness running parallel to the civilizing process. In effect to construct an identity, to know who you are, you need to know who you are not, and the material excluded or confined to the boundaries may continue to exhibit a fascination and allure, and to stimulate desires. Hence the attraction of the sites of 'ordered disorder': the carnival, fairs, music halls, spectacles, resorts, and today theme parks, malls, tourism. As Stallybrass and White (1986) wryly comment, the bourgeoisie never really returned from Bougainville's voyage and still succumbs to the fascination of the constructed exotic otherness.

### Note

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## Lifestyle and Consumer Culture

The term 'lifestyle' is currently in vogue. While the term has a more restricted sociological meaning in reference to the distinctive style of life of specific status groups (Weber, 1968; Sobel, 1982; Rojek, 1985), within contemporary consumer culture it connotes individuality, self-expression, and a stylistic self-consciousness. One's body, clothes, speech, leisure pastimes, eating and drinking preferences, home, car, choice of holidays, etc. are to be regarded as indicators of the individuality of taste and sense of style of the owner/consumer. In contrast to the designation of the 1950s as an era of grey conformism, a time of *mass* consumption, changes in production techniques, market segmentation and consumer demand for a wider range of products, are often regarded as making possible greater choice (the management of which itself becomes an art form) not only for youth of the post-1960s generation, but increasingly for the middle-aged and the elderly. Three phrases from Stuart and Elizabeth Ewen's *Channels of Desire* (1982: 249–51), which they see as symptomatic of the recent tendencies within consumer culture, come to mind here: 'Today there is no fashion: there are only *fashions*.' 'No rules, only choices.' 'Everyone can be anyone.' What does it mean to suggest that long-held fashion codes have been violated, that there is a war against uniformity, a surfeit of difference which results in a loss of meaning? The implication is that we are moving towards a society without fixed status groups in which the adoption of styles of life (manifest in choice of clothes, leisure activities, consumer goods, bodily dispositions) which are fixed to specific groups have been surpassed. This apparent movement towards a postmodern consumer culture based upon a profusion of information and proliferation of images which cannot be ultimately stabilized, or hierarchized into a system which correlates to fixed social divisions, would further suggest the irrelevance of social divisions and ultimately the end of the social as a significant reference point. In effect the end of the deterministic relationship between society and culture heralds the triumph of signifying culture. Are consumer goods used as cultural signs in a free-association manner by individuals to produce an expressive effect within a social field in which the old coordinates are rapidly disappearing, or can taste still be adequately 'read', socially recognized and mapped onto the class structure? Does taste still 'classify the classifier'? Does the claim for a movement beyond fashion merely represent a move within, not beyond the game, being instead a new move, a position within the social field of lifestyles and consumption practices which can be correlated to the class structure?